

Report for

Manor Farm, Stretton-on-Fosse, Warwickshire

Site Code: SOF-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View of the house from the south.

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Oxbow Books

SOF-A: MANOR FARM, STRETTON-ON-FOSSE, WARWICKSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 2223 3826

Survey Date: 21 April 1988

By: D Miles

Illustrations:

1. View of the house
2. Ground floor plan
3. Section of truss T2

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References: *VCH Warwickshire*, vol. 5, 153-7; N. Pevsner, *Buildings of England, Warwickshire*

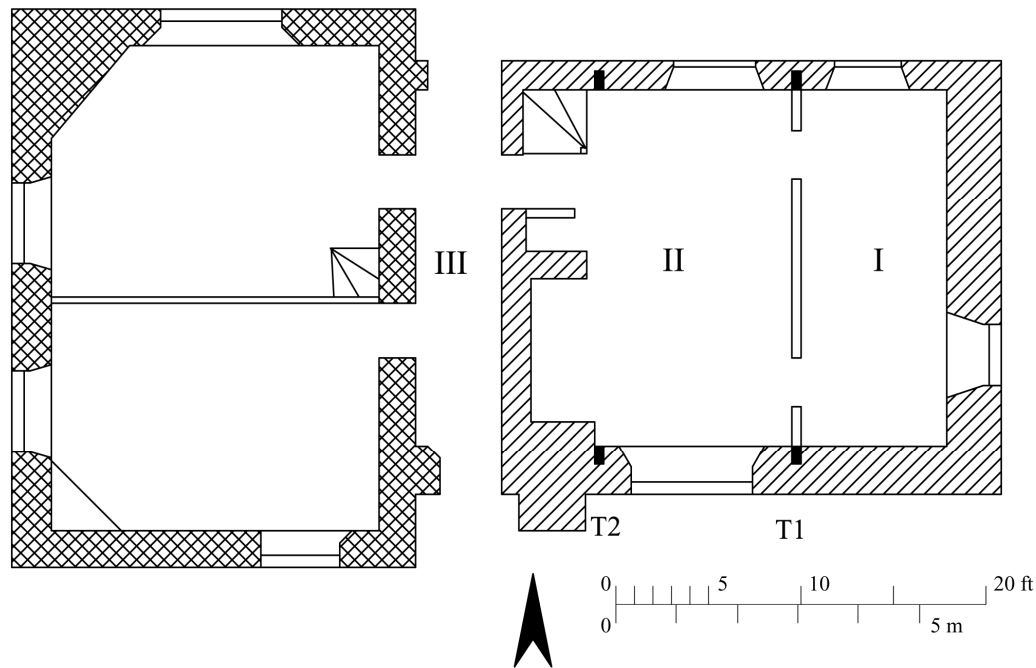


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Manor Farm retains three bays of what was probably a four-bay house of high quality, with a well-carpentered two-bay open hall. It has two crucks and a virtually complete roof dated by dendrochronology to **1409+** (probably well within the first half of the fifteenth century), with an inserted sixteenth century fireplace and a fine late seventeenth-century parlour crosswing. Truss T1 is a closed cruck truss with some original wattle and daub panels existing, and truss T2 is an open arch-braced cruck truss of very high quality, with the blades enriched with double chamfers with pyramid stops. Bays II-III were clearly an open hall, presumably with bay I as a parlour/chamber and a service end beyond bay III (lost).

PHASE 2: The middle bay contains a fine floor and a fireplace with bread oven placed to the north of the open truss, dated to 1589. A cross passage occupies the rest of the third bay. The stone walls of bays I-II may also date from this phase.

PHASE 3: The later seventeenth-century parlour wing replaces the service end of the original house. It is very nicely detailed, with ovolo moulded mullions and splayed windows. The exterior walls are stone built, but the partition between the two rooms is timber framed. It has an upper floor and attic.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The main cruck block is of three bays. It now has stone walls of coarse rubble, but it appears that that this stone wall replaces earlier timber framing, since the lower backs of the purlins in bay I have wind brace halvings, which relate to a truss positioned within the present gable wall. Bay I is only 8ft

long, compared to 10ft for bay II, suggesting that it originally ended at the outer side of the present gable wall.

Truss T1 is a closed cruck truss with no ornamentation whatsoever, with only a tiebeam and collar and a central stud between the two which forms one of the door jambs upstairs. The space above the tiebeam retains its original wattle and daub infill, and there are stave holes in the underside of the tiebeam, indicating that this was originally partly closed. A brick wall of very thick (3 1/8in) bricks now divides bays I and II under the tiebeam. The feet of the crucks are supported on corbelled stone blocks.

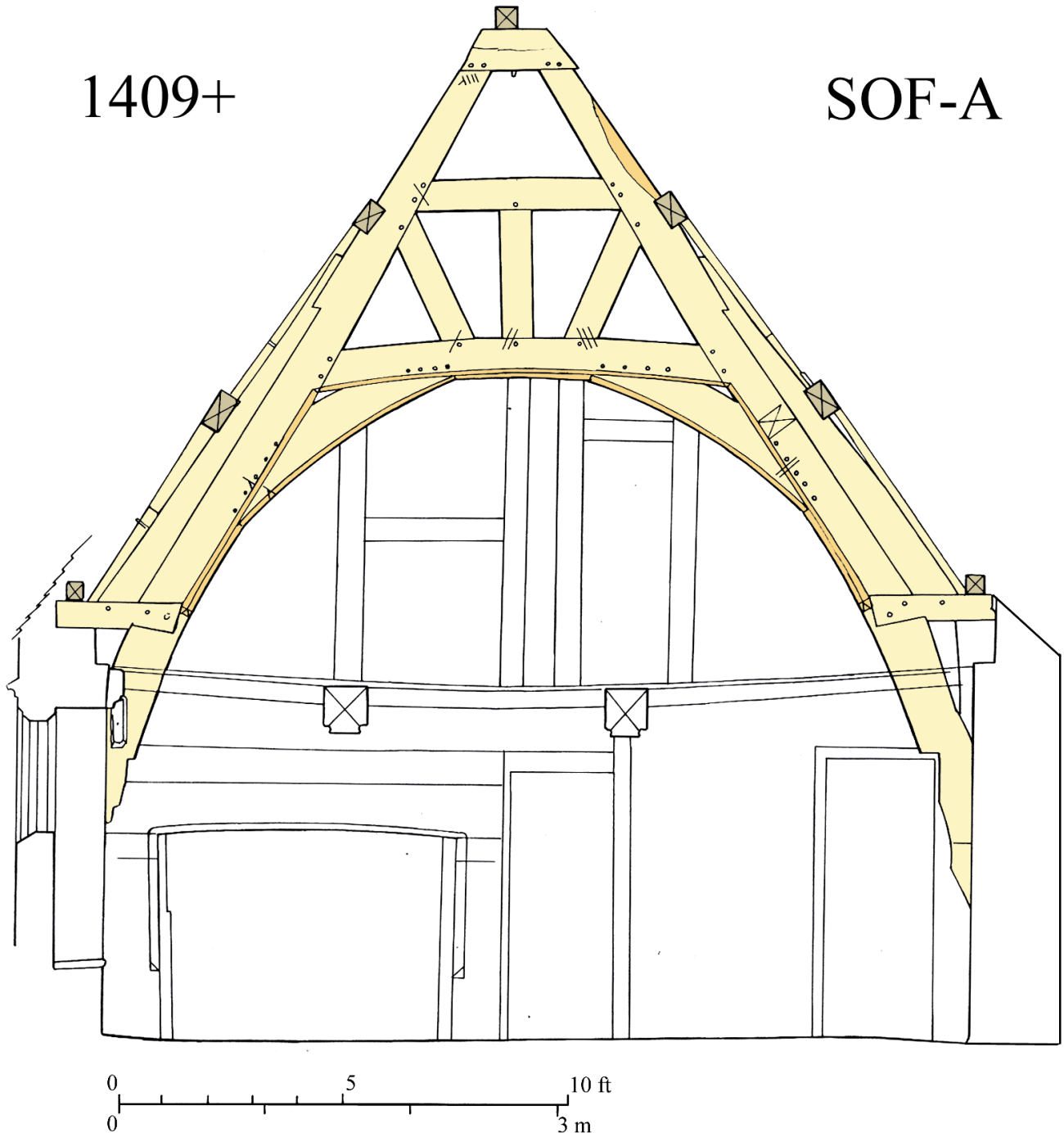


Fig. 3. Section of truss T2.

Truss T2 is an extremely well carpentered example of an arch-braced open cruck, with a collar at the same level as that in the first truss, and a further collar some 3ft higher with V-struts and a central stud between the two. The blades are halved, heart-sawn, possibly from same tree, and are cut to a smooth curve. The apex is of type 'C', with the square-set ridge piece carried on a saddle. Both sides of

the truss have very well-executed double chamfers; the first chamfer runs onto the underside of the lower collar, while the second follows the arch braces. The chamfers are finished with pyramid stops at cruck spur level. These spurs are half lapped with barefaced dovetails and secured by two skew pegs. The spurs carry the packing pieces and wallplate and were supported at the outer ends by studs, the mortices for which remain. The feet of the crucks are buried in the stone walls. Carpenter's marks are visible on the south side of this truss, most of the joints being identified with scratch marks which often cross the joint.

The packing pieces are of oak, and the lower purlins are trenched into their backs. The lower tier of purlins are of elm, measuring 5½ by 9½-10½in; the upper tier of are of oak, 5 by 8½in; both sets have through-splayed scarfs. The upper and lower edges of the lower purlins (only) have ¾in chamfers with step stops. The ridge piece measures 6 by 6in and is of elm. Two tiers of wind-braces rise to the undersides of both purlins. They are concave in form, of oak measuring 2½ by 7-8in. They have bevelled halved lap joints with barefaced dovetails to the purlins and, where they meet on the truss, they are halved and pegged to the backs of the packing pieces. The wall-plates are 5 by 5in, of elm. Surviving original rafters are 2½ by 6-7in, mostly of elm. The upper purlin and rafters, and the upper part of truss T1, are smoke blackened on both sides.

PHASE 2: Just on the north side of truss T2, in third bay III, a massive chimney stack has been inserted, built of very good quality stonework, which incorporates a bread oven. It presumably dates from 1589, as this date and the initials 'TL(P)' are inscribed within a circle on the mantel beam. The first floor in bay II was probably inserted at the same time. It is carried on two axial beams, 13 by 12in with unusual hollow mouldings and unusual stop chamfers (visible only at the east end). An elaborate half-beam runs along the west side of the room, with a hollow moulding as on the central beams, with an additional roll above. The common joists have 1in chamfers with bevelled stops. An inserted tiebeam has been lapped over the south face of the crucks, and the area above this and below the collar has timber framing with wattle and daub infill. The upstairs rooms in bays I and II are now ceiled just below the upper purlins.

The east gable wall has an early twin casement window on the ground floor, a triple window on the first floor and a small window above it in roof space. The ground floor window is a triple-light timber framed casement of possibly sixteenth century date, with wooden lintel over. The two octagonal mullions are 3in wide, and it still retains some diamond leaded lights. This window has been concealed by a lean-to outhouses built within the last hundred years. Downstairs, bay II has a four-light casement window with window seat on the west side, and a triple casement on the east. Upstairs the east side has a wooden two-light dormer window. The cross passage has opposed doors, both with low, well-shaped four-centred arched heads. The low dormer over the eastern door has been altered to match its neighbour in the second bay.

Apart from the chimney stack, the rest of bay III is taken up with a cross passage and a staircase. This bay is divided on the line of the back of the chimney by a brick wall, similar to that under the closed truss. This wall is carried up through the roof and carries a stone coping, giving the false impression that the original house ended in the middle of the third bay. The west wall of this bay is of stone and, as at the other end, halvings on the lower backs of the purlins for wind-braces indicate the position of the next truss. Fragments of elm timbers are reused in the roof truss above this wall, with principals crossed at the apex. The provenance of these timbers is unknown.

PHASE 3: The crosswing is a very smart parlour end, which must date from the later seventeenth century on architectural grounds. It replaces the last hall truss and the lower end of the original house. The exterior is of well dressed Cotswold stone, with hood moulding over all windows. An oculus window in the west gable lights the roof space above the attic room. The gable ends have stone copings with a finial at the west end. A date of 1765 is inscribed on the SE corner of the crosswing, but seems too late to relate to its original construction. It has two rooms on each floor, and an attic, the stairs having originally been positioned in the south-east corner of the wing, as a window there is of a different height than the others, and the floor joists have been renewed in that area. The present stairs cut across the connecting doorway. The crosswing roof has two tiers of clasped oak purlins are 7 by 8in; they have bridled scarf joints with splayed abutments. The rafters measure 3½ by 2½in.

The southern rooms have the best detailing. The floor joists are 3½ by 5in with beaded edges. The main beams measure 12½ by 11½in and have 1½in ovolo mouldings with stepped stops. The lintels over the windows are finished in the same way as the main beams. The western rooms are much plainer, with flat chamfers with scroll stops on both joists and main beams. The fireplaces and chimney in the south-west corner are of the nineteenth century, with a brick stack. The fireplaces in the north-west corner are original, with lintels matching the outside door-heads of the cross passage. The chimney to this stack throws over to the centre of the north gable, pushing the attic window over to the west. The cross wall is timber framed with middle rails, all members of which measure 4 by 7½in. The axial beams rest on a rail with shoulders cut into the post on either side, and above the beam is a plate, notched for the communicating door. Much of the wattle and daub plaster remains in this partition.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The documentary history has not been investigated from primary sources. The present manor house is of 1836 (Pevsner, *VCH*), and it seems very likely that Manor Farm was its predecessor.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: 10 samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 21st April 1988, and 7 further samples on 26th September 1988. Samples 10 and 13 cross-match ($t = 4.3$) but could not be dated.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

| Sample Code | Sample Location | Total Rings | Sapwood Rings | FMR Date | LHR Date | LMR Date | Date Cat |
|-------------|---|-------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| SOF-A01 | Cruck blade truss T2 N side | 75 | — | 1316 | — | 1390 | * |
| SOF-A02 | Packing piece truss T2 Nside | 32 NM | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A03 | Cruck blade truss T2 S side | 30 NM | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A04 | Packing piece truss2 S side | 46 | 12 | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A05 | Cruck blade truss1 S side | 61 | 17 | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A06 | Collar truss T1 | 42 | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A07 | Collar truss T2 | 45 | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A08 | Purlin bay II, S side | Not Oak | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A09 | Purlin bay II, N side | Not Oak | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A10 | Cruck blade truss T1 N side | 36 | 14C | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A11 | Arch brace truss T2, N side | 47 | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A12 | Arch brace truss T2, N side | 44 | 02 | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A13 | Central stud lower/upper collar truss T2 | 38 | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A14 | Brace lower collar/N cruck blade truss T2 | 65 | — | — | 1335 | — | 1399 5 |
| SOF-A15 | Upper collar truss T2 | 20 NM | — | — | — | — | — |
| SOF-A16 | Brace lower collar/S cruck blade T2 | 54 | — | 1342 | — | 1395 | 5 |
| SOF-A17 | S cruck spur truss T2 | 30 NM | 2 | — | — | — | — |

Site sequence (composed of samples 14, 16), 65 rings long matched at 1335–1399 with t -values (see VA20.89, 22.91 for Site sequences): 5.3(STRASQ03), 4.1(WELASQ01), 3.6(OXHASQ04), 3.0(ALCASQ01), 3.1(E.MID). * Sample 1 matches at 1316–1390 with lower t -values.

Earliest possible felling date: **1409+** (no heartwood-sapwood boundary present on any dated samples). With wide-ringed timbers used throughout, it is unlikely that more than a moderate number of rings were lost during conversion, and a date well within the first half of the 15th century is indicated.